WordPerfect eases file naming

BUSINESS TOOLS

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Apple Macintosh users have long been able to give truly descriptive names to their files, easing the task of finding them later.

Now, WordPerfect 5.1 has given the DOS world some of the same capability, at least for word processing documents.

It's not that other programs haven't tried to solve this problem. I must have tested half a dozen over the years. But they were always more trouble then they were worth, mainly because the interface did not work smoothly with word processing programs such as WordPerfect. Only by putting the solution within WordPerfect was the almost-ideal solution found.

It's still not perfect, but it sure tops the alternatives. Here's how it differs from what you may be used to:

■ With earlier versions of Word-Perfect, 4.2 and 5.0, you were asked to supply a file name whenever you saved a file. It had to be no more than eight characters, followed by a dot, followed by no more than three characters. Now, with the 5.1 version, up to 68 characters can be entered.

■ With earlier versions, whenever all your documents were listed, just the eight plus three characters were listed for each one. Now, not only is the long name listed, but a unique eight plus three name is created by the program if you don't enter one. Thus, you have the best of both worlds.

■ Before, you could quickly and easily change document names in the list-files screen. Now, it's not so easy. You have to retrieve the document and resave it with a new name.

■ And before, you could quickly retrieve files using the short name without going through the list-files screen. Now you still can if you use the short name, but you'll probably forget the short name if you don't use it regularly.

These file name changes are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to all the improvements offered by version 5.1. Some of the others are: optional pull-down menus similar to Microsoft Word, mouse support, and context-sensitive help screens.

The key question that was foremost in my mind as I reviewed the new version was, is it worth bothering with the change? It takes a bit of effort to install it on your computer. And it could take more than a bit of work to change any macros you might have to be consistent with the new version.

The answer depends upon whether you've already upgraded from the older version 4.2 to 5.0. The great majority of WordPerfect users never did so when 5.0 came out about a year ago, and this might be a good time to jump right to the newer 5.1.

On the downside, if you're happy with 4.2 — and several million users apparently still are — and if all these new-fangled features don't impress you, a good argument could be made for not fixing what isn't broken. It takes mental energy to change.

■ The Bottom Line: Despite the extra effort necessary, WordPerfect's new long document names is a feature worth upgrading for. It's a "must have" if you create many documents in WordPerfect, and you want to access them weeks or months later.

If you're a current WordPerfect user, I highly recommend it. And if you not, you might want to consider switching to the program, especially since its generally recognized as the current standard for word processing with PCs.

WordPerfect is published by WordPerfect Corp., 1555 N. Technology Way, Orem, Utah 84057, (800) 225-5000. The latest version is available for $85. The list price of the program is unchanged for new buyers at $495. It's commonly discounted, however.

Hillel Segal's weekly column evaluates gadgets, small-computer hardware and software, seminars, and books designed to enhance business productivity.